

# Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: Evaluation of the Program “Sharing Mouth to Mouth: My Body, Nobody Can Touch It”

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**Abstract**—Sexual violence, and particularly child sexual abuse, is a serious problem all over the world, México included. Given its importance, there are several preventive and care programs done by the government and the civil society all over the country but most of them are developed in urban areas even though these problems are especially serious in rural areas. Yucatán, a state in southern México, occupies one of the first places in child sexual abuse. Considering the above, the University Unit of Clinical Research and Victimological Attention (UNIVICT) of the Autonomous University of Yucatan, designed, implemented and is currently evaluating the program named “Sharing Mouth to Mouth: My Body, Nobody Can Touch It”, a program to prevent child sexual abuse in rural communities of Yucatán, México. Its aim was to develop skills for the detection of risk situations, providing protection strategies and mechanisms for prevention through culturally relevant psycho-educative strategies to increase personal resources in children, in collaboration with parents, teachers, police and municipal authorities. The diagnosis identified that a particularly vulnerable population were children between 4 and 10 years. The program run during 2015 in primary schools in the municipality whose inhabitants are mostly Mayan. The aim of this paper is to present its evaluation in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency. This evaluation included documental analysis of the work done in the field, psycho-educational and recreational activities with children, evaluation of knowledge by participating children and interviews with parents and teachers. The results show high efficiency in fulfilling the tasks and achieving primary objectives. The efficiency shows satisfactory results but also opportunity areas that can be resolved with minor adjustments to the program. The results also show the importance of including culturally relevant strategies and activities otherwise it minimizes possible achievements. Another highlight is the importance of participatory action research in preventive approaches to child sexual abuse since by becoming aware of the importance of the subject people participate more actively; in addition to design culturally appropriate strategies and measures so that the proposal may not be distant to the people. Discussion emphasizes the methodological implications of prevention programs (convenience of using participatory action research (PAR), importance of monitoring and mediation during implementation, developing detection skills tools in creative ways using psycho-educational interactive techniques and working assessment issued by the participants themselves). As well, it is important to consider the holistic character this type of program should have, in terms of incorporating social and culturally relevant

characteristics, according to the community individuality and uniqueness, consider type of communication to be used and children’ language skills considering that there should be variations strongly linked to a specific cultural context.

**Keywords**—Child sexual abuse, evaluation, PAR, prevention.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE real dimension of violence in its various types is unknown in exact numbers for many reasons. One reason has to do with cultural aspects that make it no visible, either because its occurrence is a private matter, so people is, somehow, pressured to keep it in secret and make it no public or because such acts are in some way culturally standardized so people do not perceive it as violence. Another reason has to do with the existence of significant variations in definitions and research methods that keep sexual violence to some invisible point and outside official records or agendas of public policy makers [1].

Still, violence reported reaches significant levels that are sufficient to prove that it affects millions of people worldwide and represents a serious global public health and human rights problem and was recognized as such by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 [1]. As a problem transcends borders and socioeconomic status carrying a significant human costs. Sexual violence is one of its expressions that does not distinguish gender or age, like many other types of violence. WHO, in 2002, confirmed this situation in the World Report on Violence and Health at which global violence is examined, particularly in youth. This document also includes reports of abuse and neglect and various forms of sexual violence [2].

As often happens with other types of violence, sexual violence is not recognized, and often not denounced; so, for every reported case, there are surely many more never denounced. Even so, rates of sexual violence reported worldwide are significant enough to make it a priority need for attention and promote the integration of different actors to intervene at different levels.

Currently, as in other parts of the world, sexual violence in its different types is a social problem that occurs in Mexico, particularly in the state of Yucatan at the southeastern zone of the country. According to information reported about crime rate by the General Attorney of the State of Yucatan (FGELY), in 2014 (latest reported information) there were 254 allegations of sexual offenses (rape) and other 487 allegations classified as other sexual offenses [3].

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Regarding violence in children, in 2010 Yucatán was reported as one of five states where most cases of child abuse were reported [4], with 469 sexual abuse reports and 354 of those cases confirmed. In the Children and Youth Consultation for 2015, done by the National Electoral Institute [5], the data for Yucatan elaborated with 30,607 children between 6 and 17 years, indicate that 1,343 children between 6 and 9 reported physical violence in their homes. As for children 10 to 13 years, regarding violence at home: 1245 reported physical violence, 1997 verbal violence, 953 psychological violence and 460 sexual violence. As for young people aged 14 to 17 years, 847 reported some form of violence at home, of which 120 reported particularly sexual violence. In this context, UNIVICT of the Autonomous University of Yucatan (UADY) has the objective of being a victimological attention unit which also does research and social programs, according to the university values of social responsibility. During the past seven years, this unit detected two main reasons for therapeutic services: family violence (23.7%), followed by child sexual abuse (11%) [6]. This situation reflects the case of Yucatan that makes of this state one of the first places on these issues in the country. Such crimes have large and negative impacts. According to [7], in short term, should be emphasized diverse consequences such as “accommodation syndrome to child sexual abuse”, which includes five phases [7]:

1. Impotence. Victims of sexual abuse generate a phenomenon of learned helplessness, since their attempts to prevent abuse loans default.
2. Maintenance of secrecy. Manipulation and threats to which they are exposed, requires them to maintain a double life, especially in cases of domestic abuse, to maintain secrecy and to avoid disclosure.
3. Entrapment and accommodation. If the abuse continues over time, the child will gradually assume the role of the aggressor couple.
4. Spontaneous or forced Revelation. When it comes to disclosure, it usually happens with an equal, produced either spontaneously or forcibly by an adult when assessing the evidence.
5. Retraction. If there is no effective intervention, even having it, retraction is common because of guilt, shame or fear.

Another aspect to note is that some children may live sexual abuse and remain asymptomatic or show no sign of trauma. The reason may be the child's own experience (according to their age and the execution of abuse, he/she cannot perceive it as an attack) or because of a temporary blocking. Therefore, it is essential to supervise children victims of sexual assault, whatever they present symptoms or not [7]. The attention for a victim of sexual crime should not only focus on the care of their injuries, but must include the coordinated action between various professionals providing psychological care, giving short and medium term monitoring, providing care and support for the family, as well as a comprehensive care to the aggressor. If a person is not rehabilitated, there will be high chances of repeating behavior. We emphasize a holistic

approach because sexual offenses cannot be understood from a criminological policy perspective, if we do not consider that crime prevention has to generate all the necessary resources in different aspects in the fight of the sexual crimes.

WHO [2] indicates that sexual violence in its various manifestations is preventable and that social change is possible. However, it requires the commitment and cooperation of developers, policy makers, researchers, health personnel, educators, social workers, psychologists, police officers, prosecutors and members of families. In this work is also important to consider the various social, cultural and economic risk factors that often occur under conditions of disparity and social injustice, which affect individuals and various groups. In this regard, it is important to recognize these situations to decrease them while it is also important to work on increasing and strengthening different protective factors.

Given its importance there are several preventive and care programs in México and particularly in Yucatán done by the government and the civil society, but most of them are directed to teachers and developed in urban areas even though these problems are especially serious in the rural area of the state. That is why, UNIVICT, thereby contributes to this effort in attention of such problems through a participatory action research (PAR) program done in Yaxcabá, one of the rural municipalities in the southeastern zone of the state where most of its 15,000 habitants are mayan. This is a scientific methodology based on dialogue and active participation so that through this, participants get involved (both, researchers and people). This methodology investigates concrete reality, seeking a better understanding of the central problems of people own choosing, becoming aware of their origins and possible solutions and, from this, design and act in joint proposals that lead to solving the problems identified by implementing different projects. This kind of projects develop in three phases, known in PAR as diagnostic, intervention and evaluation.

Regarding diagnosis, we chose participatory social diagnosis that aims to give the community the opportunity to exercise their right of free opinion and expression of their needs or problems to work on them and provide autonomy to take effective action decisions aimed to improve their living conditions [8].

The diagnosis was done in 2014 in five communities of the rural municipality of Yaxcabá, (Yaxcabá, Tixcaltuyub, Libre Unión, Tahdzibichén y Tiholop), communities that were reported with higher incidence in sexual abuse within the municipality. We considered the steps proposed by Astorga [8] and Ander Egg [9]:

- 1) Identify the problem. In this case related to family violence and child sexual abuse, so participants contribute with their knowledge about these problems, their impact on the communities, causal factors, conditions and risks to which children are exposed, actions that have been undertaken to prevent and resolve such situations in the municipality, taking into account the experiences, knowledge and opinions of the inhabitants. For that, we

used workshops, focus groups and interviews to local mayor, health personnel, police, teachers, parents, preschool and primary school children.

- 2) Process information, to sort, classify, analyze and synthesize to, thereby, prioritize information according to important aspects in order to design prevention strategies and promoting care for the safety of children, their health development and welfare. In this work, we used the action strategy named WTSO matrix, to sort the extracted information in a single frame allowing locate Weaknesses, Threats, Strengths and Opportunities to the problem identified [10].
- 3) Information devolution, first to the municipal authorities on the results found to cast the way the problem will be necessary intervener. We also called adults in the community to a meeting to provide them the results.

The results identified that children between 4 and 10 years were a vulnerable population, because they have a particular meaning for confidence that makes them to get involved in trust relationships that lead them to interact with people who could be a risk factor. Children not always choose parents as people to turn to in case of risk situations; they had difficulties to differentiate secret situations and had no alternatives to face such risks if they were involved in one. We identified use of seduction and blackmail, fear, sexualized behavior, isolation, less of enthusiasm, changes in school performance and extreme docility.

We also found that, although the issue of sexuality is not a topic openly spoken in communities, their habitants are open to deal with it when it comes to protecting the safety of children in the community. Additionally, we got information about the physical state of schools, what resources they have, the staff working in them and the dynamics with which they operate. All this information was important because it served later as the basis for designing the program activities.

Based on the diagnosis, we designed and implemented the program during 2015 in seven primary schools and three preschools of four communities. The main participants were five to ten years old children studying 2° y 3° grade in preschool or 1°, 2° y 3° of primary schools. It also included caregivers and police. Program general aim was to prevent child sexual abuse by developing skills for the detection of risk situations, providing protection strategies and mechanisms for prevention through culturally relevant participative and psycho-educative strategies to increase personal resources in children, in collaboration with parents and teachers, and the training of police in sexual abuse matters.

This program highlights the importance of carrying out intercultural elements; for example, the program required to work in the reconceptualization of the concept of trust but we had to consider the cultural background and own habits of the community without compromising safety stands for children. The program also emphasizes the use of strategies that promote active and natural participation of the various community stakeholders (caregivers, teachers, children, police), that is why during the project implementation an important aspect was to find appropriate mechanisms of

communication between facilitators and stakeholders to achieve an effective work.

The program had a campaign format. The main activities were:

- 1) Puppet theater: What is sexual abuse? An introduction to sexual abuse, prevention strategies and self-care behaviors that children can use.
- 2) Images to identify public and private body parts: Figures of a boy and a girl where children have to sign different body parts in order to visualize the body parts that are common to observe and distinguish them from those which are intimate areas, emphasizing during the activity the rights children have over their own body.
- 3) Sheets of how can the secrets be? (Bad and good secrets): Present risk and protection situations, emphasizing the emotional responses that usually arise in different situations where a person has to keep a secret.
- 4) Displays about trustworthy people: Children draw about different persons they can trust and talk to when they find them involved in risk situations.
- 5) The aid institutions and the risk situations with the traditional game "Wolf, Are you there? While doing the activity, children have the opportunity for decision making when they find themselves in different risk or protective situations.
- 6) Itzel's key and lock narrative story: Through a story, run the explanation about different situations related to bribery, blackmail or reward, strange and trusted people, touching, fondling and the importance of communication with trusted people. All this by using metaphors of a key and a lock. The story represents, in short, the integration of the different activities done with children through the whole campaign. At the end of the program, each boy and girl participant received the printed story.
- 7) Caregiver fair: It consisted of a series of activities that were in line with the program for girls and boys. These activities were: a) How to talk about sexuality with my daughter or son. b) Detection risk indicators or disturbing behavior that makes them vulnerable. c) How to explain the importance of body protection and areas of care. d) What to do if a sexual abuse happens or if I know about the abuse to someone else.
- 8) Police training: Sessions about sexual abuse prevention issues: Human Rights, Pro person Principle, sexual offenses under the Criminal Code of the state of Yucatan, crisis management, police identity, linking to victims' protection.
- 9) Teachers attended all the activities done with children and afterwards they attended several focus groups to recuperate their experience. In these sessions was also implemented a dialogue about risk behaviors, how to identify a sexual abuse, what to do in case of identifying one, and other related matters.

Currently, it is running the third phase of the Program: the evaluation under the conviction about the importance of rescuing the experiences from the program implementation, so that we can identify the achievements and needs arising to,

thereby, generate ideas to strengthen and improve the results by the participation of the different actors involved. To do so, we are working on the process evaluation (analysis of activities and strategies implemented), outcomes (knowledge and skills acquired by different actors), and lessons learned that can be applied in the future.

The process evaluation regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the program is running during the semester January-June of 2016. The aim of this paper is to present the design and first results of this evaluation.

## II. METHOD

The evaluation includes:

- a) Documental analysis of the work done in the field, Rapporteur ships reviews, attendance lists, photographs, reports and other documents in order to verify compliance with defined goals and how different activities were carried out. These analyses are already finished.
- b) Psycho-educational and ludic activities to evaluate the knowledge acquired by the participating children through a video and a Program evaluation booklet. While watching the video the children answered in the notebook. The tasks were about differentiating between public and private body parts, 2) distinguishing good and bad secrets 3) choosing the right answer (talking to a trustworthy person) in three risky situations.

For evaluation, we considered incorporating interactive media through the creation of a system that is dynamic and more effective to evaluate a first level of ownership and discrimination according to the type of health program and the stage of development in children. The criteria for deciding an interactive evaluation were the following:

- 1) The children require ludic and visual stimuli to appropriate each concept.
- 2) The congruence between the implemented program considering psycho-educational elements and materials, and their subsequent evaluation form.
- 3) Assessment in such cases should be to feedback and with nonintrusive character such as "success" and "failure". Avoiding generating and reinforcing a complacent attitude in children, which is precisely one of the characteristics of risk.

We made a video that projected and raised each of the themes of the program:

1. Public and private parties. Corresponding figures of a girl and a boy, children choose public or private parts by circular pointing using different color labels.
2. Situations of risk. Six different risk and danger situations where children have to choose how to act upon: a) be partakers of the risk; b) remain silent; c) advise someone trustworthy.
3. Good and bad secrets: Three examples where children distinguish which of the secrets given correspond to a good secret and which are a bad secret, in order to demonstrate their ownership of the distinction between those who cause damage to others that are harmless.

So far, this part of the evaluation is finished at the primary school in one of the four communities, with children from first to third grade. The video was watched and followed by children in an ordered sequence in a pictorial answers' booklet, where they had to choose the corresponding option (generally three options according to the development of children in this age group).

The procedure was to divide into smaller subgroups the largest groups (15 to 30 children). A facilitator accompanied each subgroup, and was in charge for clarifying instructions and facilitate the process for children, while they were following the interactive video. The video included time pauses to give opportunity to reflection and some time to response.

Following the lifting of the evaluation, children watched and interacted with the video feedback, with the purpose of enhancing learning through how the characters of the Program decided in the different situations. The main point was to reinforce primary content and learning, rather than a comparison of "success" and "failures" and under the premise that they not remain with false assumptions regarding protection decisions.

- c) Interviews and focus groups with parents and teachers and other community actors. This activity is being designed oriented to identify the effects of the Program implementation especially regarding the use of the knowledge acquired, in everyday situations. We are working in these activities planning.

## III. RESULTS

The results through the documental analysis show high efficiency in fulfilling the tasks and achieving primary objectives and goals. The program attended 460 boys and 408 girls, in total 868 people. The work with adults included 189 caregivers and 40 police. In some way, 39 students were also indirect beneficiaries because through their participation in different activities the program contributed to students' complete formation.

Regarding activities with children, we implemented all of them except two (public and private parts and caregivers fair) in one of the preschool institutions.

Four successful training sessions were done with police members and provided guidelines for the creation of a Crime Prevention Squad.

Regarding to teachers, we implemented the focus groups to recover their experience since they attended the different activities with children. They got training on sexual abuse behavior and instructions in the use of a manual elaborated by Public Education Ministry and Juridical Instances of the State of Yucatan, for detecting cases of sexual abuse and mistreatment in schools. The manual is called "Action Protocol in Cases of Mistreatment and Abuse for Teaching Institutions ". We based the incorporation of this latter element on the perceived need for teachers to have a tool for action in case of risk situations and proceed according to the main interest of care and protection of girls and boys.

We implemented caregivers' workshops in all participating

schools, favoring the participation of mothers compared to fathers. Following, in Table I, we present the report of the main goals achieved.

TABLE I  
 PROGRAM GOALS WITH THE PERCENTAGE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Goals	%
1. Program design through comprehensive prevention campaign: creation and adaptation of psycho-educational material considering sociocultural characteristics of the communities.	100%
2. Bring the program to all schools of preschool and primary education schools in different communities	90%
3. Perform a traveling puppet theater to address issues of violence, child sexual abuse and prevention of risk situations	100%
4. Create mechanisms for institutional protection through the design and implementation of training workshop for town police, regarding prevention of sexual abuse	100%
5. Design and development of a pictorial assessment instrument for children regarding the topics of the prevention campaign.	100%

Regarding efficiency, the results shows satisfactory aspects:

A first aspect is that a ludic strategy is attractive to children in the community, even more when it has regionalized characteristics. In addition, during the evaluation process, we could detect the importance of managing interactive media as a striking and attractive way to draw the attention of the children. Implementation and evaluation of activities interactively demonstrate the relevance of using tools where technology can generate creative and innovative instruments.

The risk detection was observed in the narratives of children and their ways of response. It highlights that those children who participated actively and consistently showed greater capacity for discrimination, which is essential to be safe when the risk is present. This type of interactive technology assessment enabled to reinforce in children previous knowledge acquired during the Program.

Active and constant participation in all actors is necessary because they become more involved and they learn more easily.

Adequate information provided to caregivers, parents and teachers of children about the existence of danger or risk is very important to strengthen in them the conditions of protection and care of their children. It was also evident the importance to include parents and teachers during the evaluation process not only as participants as this involve them in the same evaluative processes on which they can contribute since they participated in the program. This integration reinforces and provides indicators of the actual appropriation of abuse prevention information as an everyday act to apply at home and in their role as primary detectors of any risk.

In what concerns students, they were enriched with the community knowledge participants gave them; for example, the use and importance of the Maya language and the Mayan culture and its relationship with the subject of sexuality. Students also had the opportunity to learn about different topics of interest to the community even when they were not related directly with the program. The greatest contribution that this program has made to student participants is the approach to their own roots, to have the opportunity to interact

and participate during field visits in the everyday life of the people of the community.

Results also show opportunity areas that can be resolved with minor adjustments to the program. In this matter, it is important to work mostly with several logistic matters so the activities can be implemented according to what is planned and, during evaluation, it is important to modify the video so it gives time to children to answer adequately.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These results show the importance of holistic interventions since child sexual abuse involves various actors, both in terms of the occurrence of the problem and in its resolution, and the social and cultural contexts as important factors that generate different beliefs and actions that can easily lead to risk situations related to child sexual abuse. It is also important to include culturally relevant strategies and activities; otherwise, the program minimizes possible achievements.

On social and culturally relevant characteristics, we can say that the inclusion of regional elements was critical to regionalize and strengthen ownership of the issues by the community in the implementation and evaluation of fieldwork. Among them, we considered the following dimensions:

- 1) Language adaptation (including Mayan language and Mayanism elements, characters' costumes (traditional and mixed clothing).
- 2) Risk situations adapted to the environment and cultural activities (traditional family roles and customs).
- 3) Knowledge and assimilation of the team as part of the community (in situ extended time, mutual and continuing respect for traditions).

Considering that in Mayan communities, sexuality is not a common topic of conversation among the inhabitants, the use of sociocultural elements gained special importance and gave the information provided a sense of integration with those characteristics and elements that identifies and represents them. Because of that, we found a greater openness and a way of generating knowledge built between all stakeholders involved, in issues related to sexuality, traditionally emphasized by moral education and influenced by religion.

Another highlight is that the monitoring and mediation of facilitators is indispensable to clarity of instructions, adding examples and monitoring the implementation of the evaluation. It also allows to detect danger or risk situations, as well as qualitatively appreciate, the ways in which children tend to respond better.

It is evident the importance of participatory action research in preventive approaches because when different actors become aware of the importance of the problem they participate more actively. In addition, this kind of methodology helps to design culturally appropriate strategies and measures so that the proposal may not be distant to the people.

It is pertinent to develop detection skills tools and creative ways that serve to strengthen protective factors to sexual abuse. We emphasize that social programs must be created according to the individuality and uniqueness of each

community, in order that such programs are effective in their application.

The application of specific methods and psycho-educative techniques carried out on girls and boys in the community was important to fulfill the program's objectives. However, it is primordial to work in assessment issued by the participants themselves on these strategies and methodology, to determine the impact in promoting a reconceptualization and awareness of the problems addressed. Then, reinforce the strengths of the program in a new phase of continuity in order to obtain the expected results and fully carry out the objectives already set.

Finally, it is important to consider the type of communication used with children from this type of community, because we must take into account their abilities and language skills, own stage of development, and never forget that there may be variations as they are strongly linked to a specific cultural context. Not to consider these possible cultural variations in language can limit the adequately achievement of the objective regarding the appropriation of sexual abuse and violence prevention information and hinder the naturally assimilation by children, so they can apply it to their everyday life easily.

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